

Linkages to Learning Newsletter



Linkages to Learning, a Collaborative School-based Partnership among the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Public Schools, Public and Private Agencies, Families and Communities

LTL Newsletter Changes Look

Do you like our new look? As we've expanded services to more than twenty schools, we've decided to change our newsletter format to provide an in-depth look at the facets and faces of Linkages to Learning.

Features in the next issue will include Voices VS Violence and holiday giving. If you have other ideas, let us know!

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Linkages to the Library: Opening Doors

Since 1999, Linkages to the Library, an innovative and collaborative effort among *Linkages to Learning*, Montgomery County Public Libraries, Montgomery County Public Schools, businesses and community organizations, has been helping kids and families discover the joy of reading.

The goals of the program are to increase the number public library customers, to help boost reading skills, and to promote family reading. The teenage and adult volunteer "reading buddies" assist school-age children with reading, provide a mentoring relationship and model read-aloud behaviors to parents.

A bilingual parent component includes a library tour that highlights resources and introduces parents to the Internet and the library catalog system. Family activities, including story-time for toddlers and preschoolers, promote the development of quality time between parents and their children.

This summer, COMCAST helped the program expand to six communities at Broad Acres, Summit Hall, Greencastle, Harmony Hills, Kemp Mill and Highland elementary schools, meeting the needs of 211 children and 115 parents.

"One father told me that he was going to keep trying to do everything he could do to help his child learn, and he was very happy to see his child reading in the summer, because he knew that would help him in school."

Alice Tyler
Highland's Summer
Coordinator

Montgomery County Public Library branches in Gaithersburg, Fairland, Aspen Hill and Wheaton and the Long Branch on Wheels supported the program with space and library services and recruited and trained 141 volunteer reading buddies to work with each participant.

COMCAST generously contributed thousands of dollars for the summer site coordinators and backpacks for kids and book-bags for adults. Montgomery County's *Friends of the Library* provided transportation, and a grant from *First Books* and donations of books from *Gannett* provided over a thousand new books, enabling all participants to receive their own books.

According to Yvonne Dodd, site coordinator for Linkages at Highland Elementary School, the birthplace of the Linkages to the Library initiative, "As we've grown to serve more communities, one of the most exciting aspects is how flexible the model is, meeting the needs of each site. For example, at Broad Acres, where many families don't have access to cars, the mobile unit was key to its success. And staff and partners have been very resourceful, adding or connecting elements, like conversation clubs to help parents learn English, computer classes and health information workshops. At most sites, parents wrote stories with children and created books, and all sites had fun family events, like Library scavenger hunts and end-of the summer picnics."



Reading Buddies at the Linkages to the Libraries Kick-Off in Wheaton
-photo courtesy of COMCAST

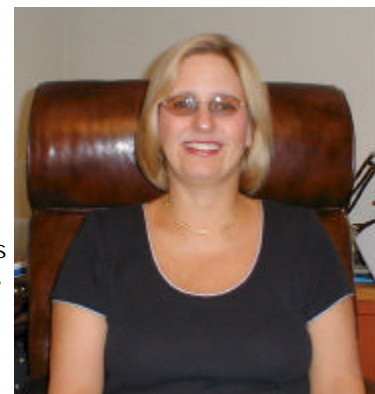
Linkages to Learning Expansion Update

Linkages to Learning has expanded to serve four additional schools: Rolling Terrace, Pine Crest, and Montgomery Knolls elementary schools and Silver Spring International Middle School.

In January, the AMIGO Program, Silver Spring YMCA Youth Services and the Department of Health and Human Services will begin providing social, mental health, health and educational support services to these schools, after site coordinators receive training and work with partners to complete community needs assessments. New site coordinators have opened their offices and have begun developing relationships with the school and community.

Thanks to additional funding awarded through a State grant, we now have a new nurse manager to support the two existing school-based health centers (SBHC) and to develop related initiatives.

Joan Glick, a pediatric nurse practitioner, is responsible for program oversight, and will work with SBHC partners on expanding services to serve additional children, increase children's access to dental services and coordinate the successful "community health promoters project." Joan, a former school nurse, served as the nurse practitioner at the Broad Acres and Harmony Hills SBHC during their formative stages.



Joan Glick, nurse manager

Volunteer Develops Linkages' Website



Pearl Zhen, Linkages to Learning's first Web-designer

Zhen "Pearl" Zhu, with a graduate degree in Computer Science from Southeastern University, brought her talents to Linkages to Learning this summer as an information technology intern.

Referred through a "help-wanted" ad placed on the Montgomery County Volunteer Center's Website, Pearl was seeking an opportunity to help the community while she sharpened her English and website development skills.

Working with the Linkages team, Pearl created a website prototype that is now entering a new stage of development through a partnership with eMontgomery, Montgomery County's interactive online service for citizens.

Linkages will be among the first wave of webpages redesigned as www.emontgomery.org and the county's current website, www.co.mo.md.us, merge to become www.emontgomery.gov. Stay tuned!

Douglas Pulse, Exceptional College Intern

This summer, Douglas Pulse, a college senior at Wake Forest University, contacted Linkages to Learning to serve the community. Douglas had previously worked performing data entry at the Summit Hall site, through Montgomery Youthworks.

A Spanish major, Douglas had attended the University of Havana in Cuba and had just returned from a month living with a Mexican family. He knew Linkages would provide a great opportunity to utilize his language skills. With the guidance of Summit

Hall's site coordinator, Ana Schmitz, and the support of mental health counselor Regina Morales, Douglas ended up assisting with many of the summer activities.

He worked with Kathy Wilcox Moore, community service aide, to support the Mighty Minds Tutoring Program, and helped facilitate the Hispanic Women's Group, the Fifth Grade Transition Group and Linkages to the Library. Additionally, Douglas taught English classes to a group of parents three times a week.

Douglas plans to return to Calcutta, India, where he previously supported Mother Teresa's Mission, and hopes to join the Peace Corps following graduation.



"Every time we needed him, whatever we asked him to do, Douglas was happy to help. And the kids and parents really appreciated him. Several of the women from the Adult ESL group decided to give him a going away party on his last day of volunteering. To honor him, all the participants in the class brought a delicious dish they made at home, and we had a great time."

Ana Schmitz
Site Coordinator
Summit Hall Elementary

HIGHLIGHTS:

It just wouldn't have been summer without...



- ? 300 families joining for the first **Annual Fun Fair at Parkland Middle School**, enjoying the moon bounce, a dunk tank, great food and prevention activities for families from Harmony Hills, Viers Mill, and Parkland schools.
- ? **Informative site coordinator meetings**, featuring Vicky Strella from Project Family Outreach, Joanne Becka, Child Care Services, Leslie Hamm from Early Childhood Services, and Min Leong, director, MCPS Department of Comprehensive Student Services;
- ? 40 Linkages' staff members joining together for team building activities at **the annual Linkages Retreat at the Lathrop Smith Center** in Rockville, under the leadership of Linn Rivera and Dirk Schenck from the Therapeutic Recreation Program;
- ? **Meeting new principals, guidance counselors, nurses and, teachers;**
- ? **Orientation and training for 10 new staff members and interns**, reviewing Linkages' structure, services, policies, resources and data system;
- ? New **First Class email** accounts for all of Linkages' school-based staff;
- ? **Reorganizing office space** at Summit Hall and Highland elementary schools, and **moving to new offices** at Kemp Mill, Argyle, Fox Chapel and Sally Ride elementary schools and at Gaithersburg middle school;
- ? **Opening new sites** at Montgomery Knolls, Pine Crest and Rolling Terrace elementary schools and at Silver Spring International Middle School;
- ? More **refinements of the HATS data system**, with ongoing staff review and training;
- ? Hundreds of parents and kids reading together through **Linkages to the Library;**
- ? Broad Acres' launching **Camp Gateway**, providing thirty students a month of programming, focused on developing "social skills in a multicultural world;"
- ? Mushrooming **acculturation programs and groups**, featuring community building events, recreational activities, and explorations, offered at Kemp Mill, Broad Acres, Summit Hall, New Hampshire Estates and Oak View elementary schools, and at Gaithersburg Middle School,
- ? **ESOL classes**, offered and coordinated at many sites, often at various levels, through partnerships with the Literacy Council and MCPS Adult Education;
- ? Exciting **therapeutic recreation programming** at many sites;
- ? The **Full Circle sewing group** at Highland, continuing its growth toward independence;
- ? Working with our partners to coordinate the **recruitment and placement of graduate student interns;**
- ? Working with MHA's **Voices VS Violence** prevention programs to plan presentations at LTL sites for the 2001-2002 school year;
- ? **Transition groups** for students leaving Summit Hall Elementary School, and for rising students at Roberto Clemente and Martin Luther King Jr. middle schools and Seneca Valley High Schools;
- ? Many meetings with partners from HHS, MHA's Kensington-Wheaton Youth Services, the Wheaton Rescue Squad and other agencies to help **organize educational prevention activities for the Latino Heritage Festival and Health Fair;**
- ? **Collaborating on a number of grants** with our partners, all strangely due either before we began summer vacations, or, just as we returned!





Thanks to our Donors, Volunteers and Partners



- ? *Harmony Hills PTA, the Montgomery County Department of Recreation and the Police Department, State Farm Insurance Company and the Maryland State Police*, for helping to organize and participate in Parkland's Annual Fun Fair.
- ? *Safeway*, for donating food and *Coca-Cola*, for donating beverages to support the first Annual Fun Fair at Parkland this summer for families from Harmony Hills, Viers Mill, and Parkland schools.
- ? *The Lions Club*, for providing volunteers at Parkland's Annual Fun Fair.
- ? *Peapod*, for a \$3,700 donation of disposable diapers, which were shared with Linkages sites and the Montgomery County Infant and Toddler Program.
- ? *Kathy Hargett* for a donation to provide books for the ESOL Adult Class at Summit Hall, in honor of teacher Cathy Young.
- ? *Potomac Women's Republican Club*, for donating money to support the adult ESL program at Summit Hall.
- ? *Chris Collins Weinstein*, for delivering hundreds of books donated by Gannett.
- ? *Travilah ES students and PTA*, for donating the proceeds from their Community Cents Project.
- ? *Sandy Boynton and Reverend Clark at the Church of the Ascension*, for donating over \$500 for camping supplies to enable three Summit Hall students to attend summer camp and for providing almost 100 backpacks for students at the start of the school year.
- ? *Pam Silverwood*, retired MCPS speech therapist from New Hampshire Estates, for her donations of loaves of bread to Linkages' families throughout the year.
- ? *An anonymous donor*, for donating over \$1,200 to fund the extension of the Full Circle Sewing Group at Highland through June.
- ? *Employees of Rockville Mitsubishi and Telemundo (Channel 64)*, for donating funds to cover the funeral expenses for a child from the Parkland Middle School community.
- ? *Geneva Day School*, for donations of school furnishings, toys and educational equipment.
- ? *Temple Beth Ami Nursery School*, for donations of clothes, toys, and equipment for babies/toddlers.
- ? *D.C. United and the Colburn Foundation*, for donating more than 700 tickets for children and parents to attend its Washington-based soccer games.
- ? *Danny Strauss*, for the donation of tropical fruit baskets for ten families at Harmony Hills ES in honor of his bar mitzvah at Congregation Beth El this summer.
- ? *Good Knight Child Empowerment Network*, for its collaboration with *Voices VS Violence* to increase the personal safety skills of Greencastle and Banneker students.
- ? *The Cooperative Extension Service*, for offering delicious, bilingual summer cooking courses for parents at Greencastle and New Hampshire Estate and Oak View elementary schools.
- ? *DHHS' VASAP (Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program)* for collaborating on the development of two Latina Women's Groups at Highland this fall.
- ? *Lubna Malik, Terry VanHouten, Christine Washington and Douglas Pulse*, for volunteering to tutor with Mighty Minds at Summit Hall.
- ? *Safeway, Fresh Fields and Giant Foods*, for helping to sponsor summer recreational and educational support activities at New Hampshire Estates and Oak View elementary schools.
- ? *City of Gaithersburg*, for sponsoring Summit Hall's summer picnic.
- ? *Silver Spring YMCA's Kim Hollman and her husband Edward*, a professional guide, for a tour of D.C. for new immigrant families from New Hampshire Estates and Oak View elementary schools.
- ? *Our partners with Linkages to the Library*, for their support, and especially *Comcast*, for funding the site coordinators, t-shirts, backpacks, and book-bags.



Linkages' Pioneer Receives ALA's Award

Congratulations to Ann Yeaman for receiving the American Lung Association of Maryland's 2001 Distinguished Service Award for her "hard work and dedication to helping kids with asthma."

Ann was formerly the school nurse at Highland and Summit Hall Elementary (the original Linkages' sites) where she developed many prevention programs for students and families. Ann now focuses on Public Health and School Health Services asthma initiatives.

Book Notes: Broad Acres Prevents Problem Behaviors

Bob Evert, site coordinator and mental health clinician at the Linkages to Learning School-Based Health Center, Broad Acres Elementary School, recently co-authored a chapter in *Preventing Problem Behaviors: A Handbook for Successful Prevention Strategies*.

Evert, a licensed clinical social worker with Linkages Partner, Silver Spring YMCA Youth Services, has been supporting the Linkages initiative since its inception at Broad Acres. Bob brings years of cross-cultural experience in working with children and families.

The chapter "Building Linkages to Learning through Community Partnerships" was written with co-authors Peter Leone and Karen Friedman. Leone and Friedman were members of the four-year research team from the University of Maryland at College Park's Center for Troubling Behavior which studied Linkages' impact on

students' academic performance and functioning at home and school. The book's seventh chapter describes Linkages' school-based mental health and social services at Broad Acres, which were found to significantly decrease children's negative behavior and produce some success in improving academic performance.

With a forward from noted researcher Jane Knitzer, *Preventing Problem Behaviors* was edited by Bob Algozzine and Pam Kay. A joint publication of the Council for Exceptional Children and Corwin Press, the book is available to staff through the Linkages' office, or may be ordered through Sage Publications, 805.499.0721 (voice) or email: info@sagepub.com.



Peter Leone with Bob and Zoe Evert at the Linkages Volunteer Event

Linkages Welcomes New Staff and Interns

Linkages to Learning welcomes our new site-based staff and interns:

Broad Acres ES:

Neysa Dawkins, intern (Howard University)
Fred Pratt, intern (Holy Name College Seminary)

Harmony Hills ES:

Sara Kafka, case manager
Camille Wheeler, school community health nurse

Rolling Terrace ES:

Sofia Travella, site coordinator/mental health counselor

Pine Crest ES/Montgomery Knolls ES:

Carla Pappas, site coordinator/mental health counselor

Silver Spring International MS:

Lisa Kobayashi, site coordinator

Viers Mill ES:

Joette Murray, case manager
Robin Brannan, mental health counselor

Highland:

Kelly Clements, intern (Catholic University)
Claudiny Stebler, intern (Catholic University)

Summit Hall ES:

Julianne Sim, intern (U. of Md., Baltimore)
Karen David, intern (U. of Md., Baltimore)

Project Family Outreach Supports Linkages' Families and Partners

Project Family Outreach is the Family Services Agency's outreach and prevention program that helps agencies and schools empower children, adolescents and parents to make constructive changes in their lives. "PFO" has a long history of working with Linkages to Learning, and partnered with site coordinators, school guidance counselors and mental health therapists at six Linkages to Learning schools last year.

Working with the Linkages team, PFO offers co-leaders for six to eight-session psycho-educational groups, or single session workshops on topics identified by the school community.

Because Linkages counselors, site coordinators or social work student interns co-lead the groups, the PFO model extends the effectiveness of its services, as Linkages team members bring an established and trusted relationship with the students and parents to the therapeutic process.

Vicky Strella, PFO's project director, notes, "Linkages staff follow up on issues by providing extended individual and family counseling and identify resources to address needs that emerge during the PFO groups."

Last year, groups offered to Linkages sites included: Filial Play Groups, Social Skills Groups, Parenting and Parent Support Groups in Spanish and English, Women's Empowerment Groups, Single Parenting Workshops and Groups, Anger Management and Grief and Loss Groups, and Stress Management Groups for individuals affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

PFO also provides training for staff, and recently debriefed one school's Linkages staff working to address the mental health needs following the attacks of September 11th. Funding for PFO services is provided by the Department of Health and Human Services.

"Linkages staff follow up on issues by providing extended individual and family counseling and identify resources to address needs that emerge during the PFO groups."

Vicky Strella
PFO Project Director
Family Services Agency



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ALTERNATIVE FORMATS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST



June-September 2001

Linkages to Learning

Therapeutic Recreation Builds Healthy Kids and Families

The Therapeutic Recreation Program, fondly called "TRP," provides Linkages' students and families with positive recreation and adventure-based activities. TRP also offers services at The Other Way, an alternative secondary school in Montgomery County. Linkages TRP therapists, Dirk Schenck and Linn Rivera, bring extensive training and experience to the eight Linkages' schools they typically serve each school year and summer. The teachers in school refer students or parents to the guidance counselor and Linkages mental health staff, who coordinate the TRP services. At Linkages to Learning, TRP activities include sports, games, picnics, hiking, climbing, crafts, field trips, snowboarding, biking, skating, water sports, and community service projects.

For many children in Montgomery County, spending time with friends, going on outings, playing games and having fun are just part of everyday life, yielding a bounty of social opportunities for families and communities. As parents and children get together for recreation, these "playful" experiences help build relationships and networks. But for many poor and culturally diverse families who work several jobs to keep afloat and are overburdened with family responsibilities, leisure opportunities are rare. For individuals whose own childhood's were filled with fear, these pursuits are sometimes unimaginable.

Resiliency research has shown that these positive recreational experiences not only help keep youth out of trouble, but help young people develop problem-solving and decision-making skills,

as well as build confidence, provide a sense of belonging and promote healthy relationships with peers and caring adults. Perhaps one of the most valuable benefits of therapeutic recreation for students struggling either at school, at home or in the community is the opportunity to be successful in a new way.

"Learning that they can, in fact, achieve something that is new, or that seems difficult, helps them begin to believe in themselves, and understand that it is worth trying, even when things don't always go right the first time," said Linn Rivera. "Whether I'm working with children or parents, so many times I have seen how this one experience has served as a catalyst for the individual to begin trying something else new in his or her life."

Dirk Schenck notes, "Outdoor adventure experiences provide students with a chance to discover the natural consequences and rewards of an activity. The feedback is immediate, and the group provides what I like to call a 'healthy cousin' to peer pressure. Kids rein each other in and keep each other on task. They begin to develop social skills like turn-taking and self-control that transfer to other areas in life. They also see adults in other roles, modeling exuberance and energy without chaos. Limits are natural and don't appear arbitrary, with the leader ideally facilitating the learning process. Therapeutic recreation goes beyond having fun activities- it's about transformation and personal growth."